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(54) **SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR TENSIONING A  
ROBOTICALLY ACTUATED TENDON**

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**G05B 19/04** (2006.01)

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700/245; 700/250; 700/260; 901/15; 901/23;  
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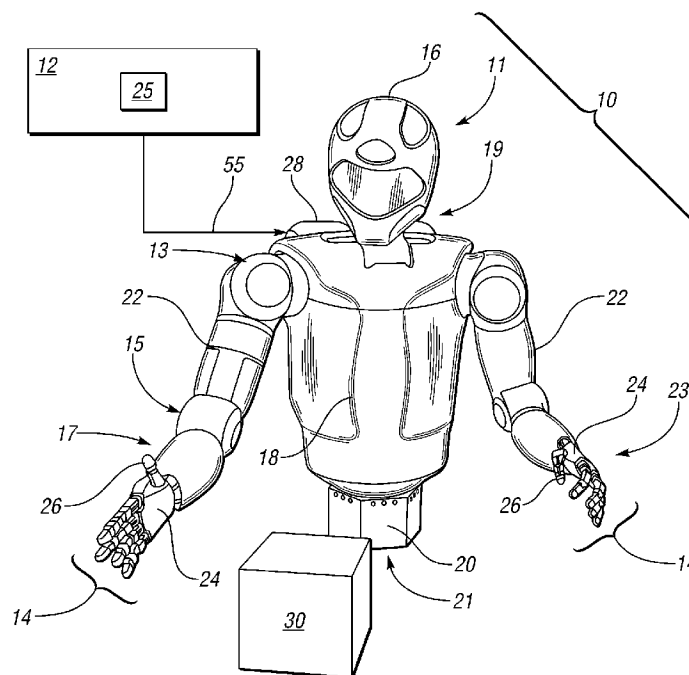
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A tendon tensioning system includes a tendon having a proximal end and a distal end, an actuator, and a motor controller. The actuator may include a drive screw and a motor, and may be coupled with the proximal end of the tendon and configured to apply a tension through the tendon in response to an electrical current. The motor controller may be electrically coupled with the actuator, and configured to provide an electrical current having a first amplitude to the actuator until a stall tension is achieved through the tendon; provide a pulse current to the actuator following the achievement of the stall tension, where the amplitude of the pulse current is greater than the first amplitude, and return the motor to a steady state holding current following the conclusion of the pulse current.

**20 Claims, 5 Drawing Sheets**



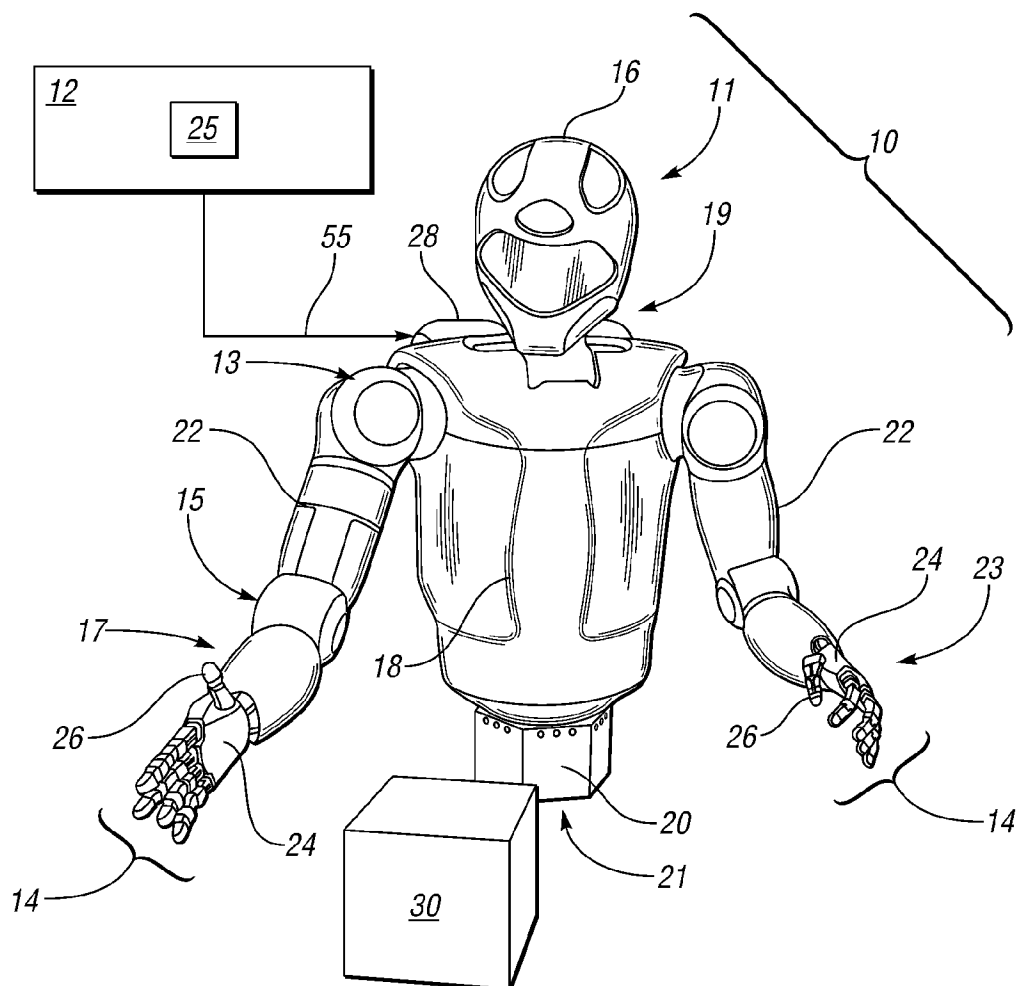


FIG. 1

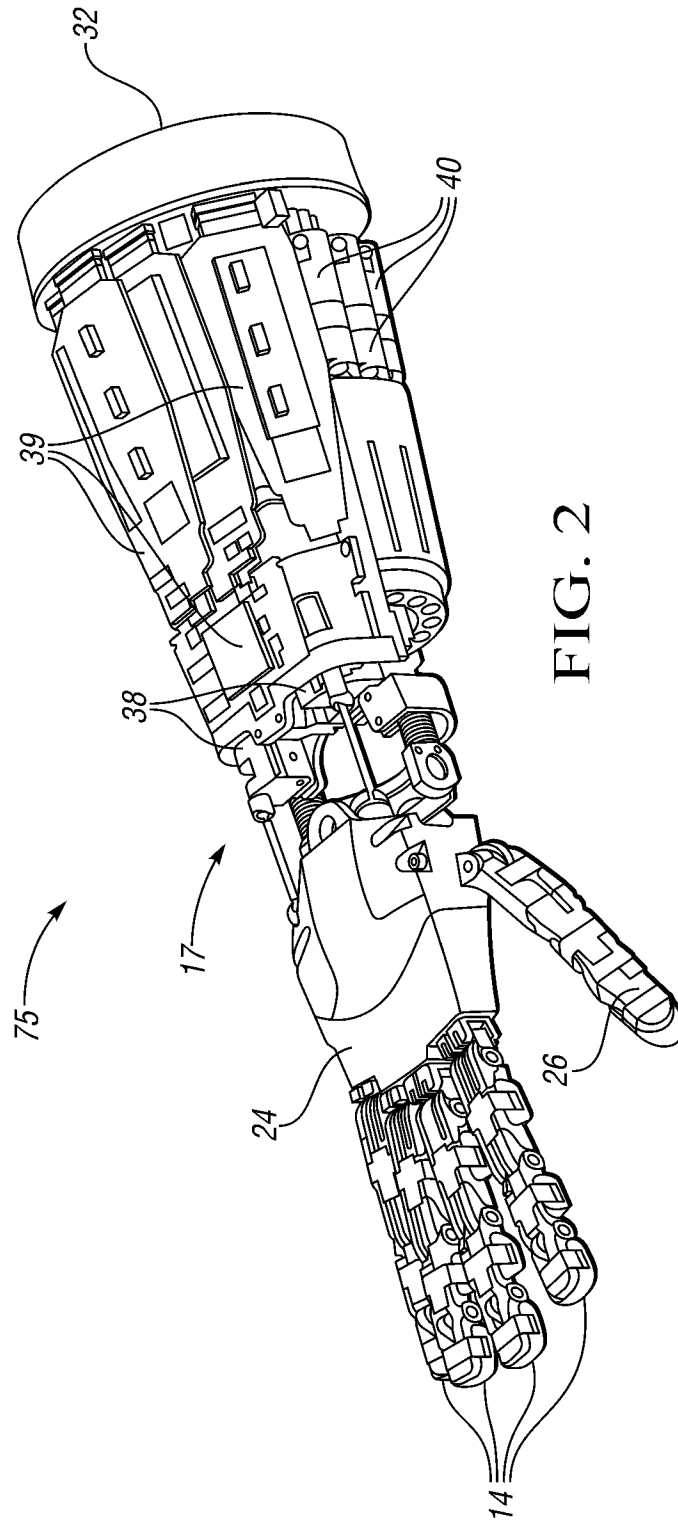
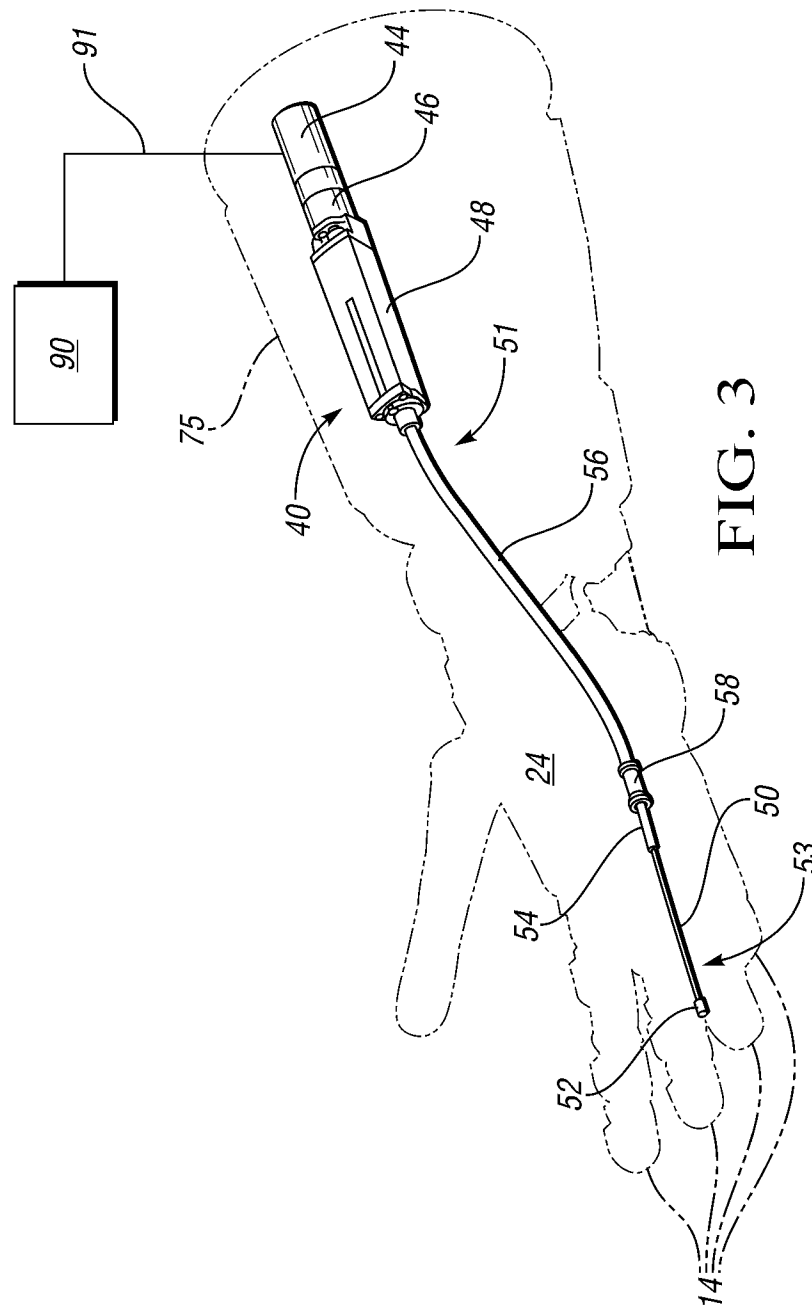


FIG. 2



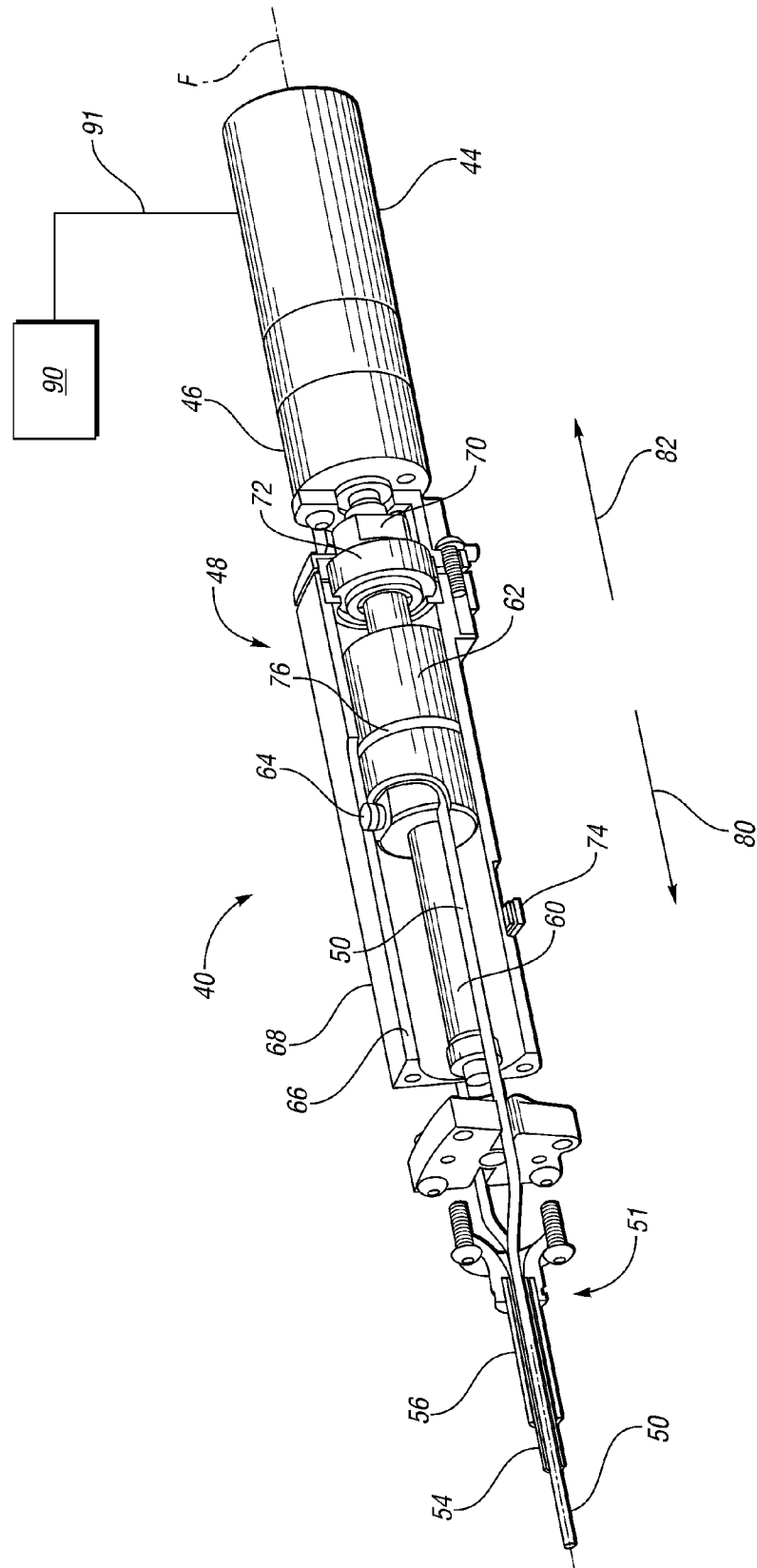
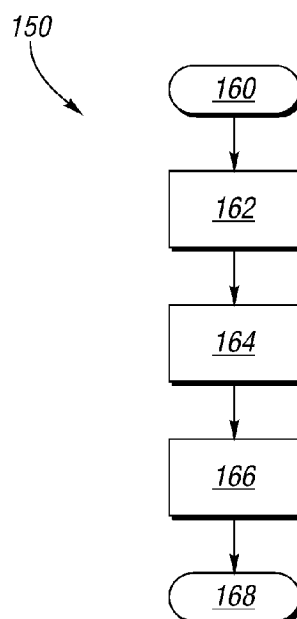
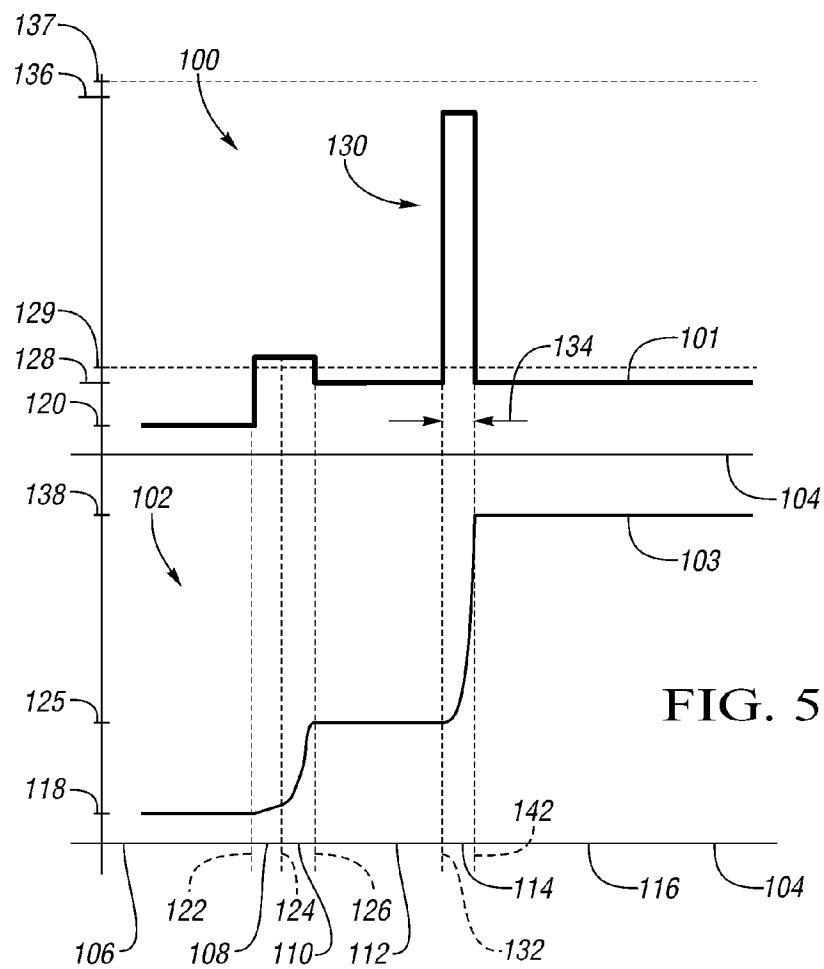


FIG. 4



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## SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR TENSIONING A ROBOTICALLY ACTUATED TENDON

### STATEMENT REGARDING FEDERALLY SPONSORED RESEARCH OR DEVELOPMENT

This invention was made with government support under NASA Space Act Agreement number SAA-AT-07-003. The invention described herein may be manufactured and used by or for the U.S. Government for U.S. Government (i.e., non-commercial) purposes without the payment of royalties thereon or therefore.

### TECHNICAL FIELD

The present invention relates generally to systems and methods for maintaining tension on a robotically actuated tendon.

### BACKGROUND

Robots are automated devices that may be capable of manipulating objects using a series of links. The links are interconnected by one or more actuator-driven robotic joints. Each joint in a typical robot represents at least one independent control variable, or a degree of freedom. End-effectors are the particular manipulators used to perform a task at hand, such as grasping a work tool. Therefore, precise motion control of the various robotic manipulators helps to achieve the required mobility, dexterity, and work task-related functionality.

Dexterous robots may be used where a direct interaction is required with devices or systems specifically designed for human use, i.e., devices requiring human-like levels of dexterity to properly manipulate. The use of dexterous robots may also be preferred where a direct interaction is required with human operators, as the motion of the robot can be programmed to approximate human motion. Such robots may include a plurality of fingers that can be actuated remotely using tendons, thus reducing the overall size and weight of the robot. Such tendons must be kept taut at all times to within a calibrated tension level, however, to actuate a finger, the tendon must be transitioned to a higher tension level. To maintain, for example, a gripping force using the finger, the tendon must remain at the higher tension level until commanded to relax.

### SUMMARY

A tendon tensioning system includes a tendon having a proximal end and a distal end, an actuator, and a motor controller. The actuator may include a drive screw and a motor, and may be coupled with the proximal end of the tendon and configured to apply a tension through the tendon in response to an electrical current.

The motor controller may be electrically coupled with the actuator and may be configured to provide an electrical current with a first amplitude to the actuator until a stall tension is achieved through the tendon. The controller may then provide a pulse current to the actuator following the stall, where the amplitude of the pulse current is greater than the first amplitude, and subsequently return the motor to a steady state holding current following the conclusion of the pulse current. In an embodiment, the motor controller may be configured to allow the tension maintained in the tendon to dwell at the stall tension for a period of time before providing the pulse current to the actuator.

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The holding current provided to the actuator may have an amplitude less than a maximum steady state current level of the system, and the amplitude of the pulse current may be less than a maximum instantaneous current level of the system.

Additionally, the pulse current provided to the actuator may be operative to increase the tension provided through the tendon to a boosted tension level, where the boosted tension level being greater than the stall tension. The actuator may then be configured to maintain the boosted tension level through the tendon following the conclusion of the pulse current.

In one configuration, the distal end of the tendon may be coupled with a finger of a dexterous robot. As such, the actuator may be a finger actuator. Additionally, the drive screw of the actuator may include a ball screw, with a ball nut disposed about the ball screw and coupled with the tendon. The actuator may be configured to maintain at least a minimal tension on the tendon at all times during operation, the minimal tension being less than the stall tension.

A method for controlling an actuator to tension a tendon may include providing a tendon and an actuator, where the actuator is configured to apply a tension through the tendon in response to an electrical current. The tendon may have a proximal end and a distal end, where the proximal end of the tendon is coupled to the actuator. The method may further include driving the actuator through an initial electrical current that has a first amplitude until a stall tension is achieved through the tendon, delivering a pulse current to the actuator following the stall, with the amplitude of the pulse current being greater than the first amplitude, and returning the electrical current delivered to the motor to a steady state holding amplitude following the conclusion of the pulse current.

The above features and advantages and other features and advantages of the present invention are readily apparent from the following detailed description of the best modes for carrying out the invention when taken in connection with the accompanying drawings.

### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a schematic illustration of a robotic system having a robot with tendon-driven fingers that may be actuated as set forth herein.

FIG. 2 is a schematic perspective view of a lower arm assembly for the robot shown in FIG. 1, the arm assembly including a plurality of tendon-driven robotic fingers.

FIG. 3 is a schematic perspective view of a tendon and actuator assembly for use in controlling dexterous robotic fingers.

FIG. 4 is a schematic perspective partially cross-sectional view of a tendon and actuator assembly, such as illustrated in FIG. 3.

FIG. 5 is a schematic graph of a motor current provided to a tendon actuator, along with a corresponding tendon tension over the duration of a grasping routine.

FIG. 6 is a flow diagram of a method for tensioning a robotically actuated tendon.

### DETAILED DESCRIPTION

With reference to the drawings, wherein like reference numbers refer to the same or similar components throughout the several views, and beginning with FIG. 1, a robotic system 10 is shown that includes a dexterous robot 11 and a controller 12. The robot 11 may include various manipulators, including a plurality of tendon-driven fingers 14. The controller 12 may be embodied as a processor and/or related hardware devices,

or alternatively as nested software-based control loops that are resident in a single or in a distributed hardware device and automatically executed by one or more processors. Furthermore, the controller 12 may include or embody a control system 25 that may perform one or more control routines.

To manipulate the fingers 14 of the dexterous robot 11, such as when grasping an object 30, the controller 12 may be operative to vary the tension applied through one or more tendons 50, such as schematically shown in FIG. 3. The control system 25 may employ, for example and without limitation, force-based control and/or a position-based control to regulate the tension maintained within a tendon. Such control may further include closed-loop force and/or position feedback to refine the controllability. Within the control system 25, the particular control law being applied, i.e., force or position, may be selected in a manner that depends upon the number of available tension sensors for a given finger 14.

In one embodiment, the robot 11 shown in FIG. 1 may be configured with a human-like appearance, and with human-like levels of dexterity to the extent necessary for completing a given work task. Humanoids and other dexterous robots can be used where a direct interaction is required with devices or systems specifically designed for human use, for example any devices requiring human-like levels of dexterity to properly manipulate an object 30. The use of a humanoid such as the robot 11 depicted in FIG. 1 may be preferred where a direct interaction is required between the robot and human operators, as motion of the robot can be programmed to closely approximate human motion. The fingers 14 of robot 11 may be directly controlled by hardware components of the controller 12, e.g., a host machine, server, or network of such devices, via a set of control signals 55 during the execution of any maneuver or work task in which the robot acts on the object 30.

The robot 11 shown in FIG. 1 may be programmed to perform automated tasks with multiple degrees of freedom (DOF), and to perform other interactive tasks or to control other integrated system components, e.g., clamping, lighting, relays, etc. According to one possible embodiment, the robot 11 may have a plurality of independently- and interdependently-moveable actuator-driven robotic joints, some of which have overlapping ranges of motion. In addition to the various joints 23 of the fingers 14, which separate and move the various phalanges thereof, the robotic joints of robot 11 may include a shoulder joint, the position of which is generally indicated in FIG. 1 by arrow 13, an elbow joint (arrow 15), a wrist joint (arrow 17), a neck joint (arrow 19), and a waist joint (arrow 21).

Still referring to FIG. 1, each robotic joint may have one or more DOF. For example, certain compliant joints such as the shoulder joint (arrow 13) and the elbow joint (arrow 15) may have at least two DOF in the form of pitch and roll. Likewise, the neck joint (arrow 19) may have at least three DOF, while the waist and wrist (arrows 21 and 17, respectively) may have one or more DOF. Depending on task complexity, the robot 11 may move with over 42 DOF. Each robotic joint contains and is internally driven by one or more actuators, for example joint motors, linear actuators, rotary actuators, and the like.

In one embodiment, the robot 11 may include just the lower arm assembly 75 shown in FIG. 2. In another embodiment, the robot 11 may include additional human-like components such as a head 16, a torso 18, a waist 20, arms 22, hands 24, fingers 14, and opposable thumbs 26, with the various joints noted above being disposed within or between these components. As with a human, both arms 22 and other components may have ranges of motion that overlap to some extent. The robot 11 may also include a task-suitable fixture or base (not

shown) such as legs, treads, or another moveable or fixed base depending on the particular application or intended use of the robot. A power supply 28 may be integrally mounted to the robot 11, e.g., a rechargeable battery pack carried or worn on the back of the torso 18 or another suitable energy supply, or which may be attached remotely through a tethering cable, to provide sufficient electrical energy to the various joints for movement of the same.

The controller 12 may be embodied, as noted above, as a server or a host machine, i.e., one or multiple digital computers or data processing devices, each having one or more microprocessors or central processing units (CPU), read only memory (ROM), random access memory (RAM), electrically-erasable programmable read only memory (EEPROM), a high-speed clock, analog-to-digital (A/D) circuitry, digital-to-analog (D/A) circuitry, and any required input/output (I/O) circuitry and devices, as well as signal conditioning and buffering electronics.

While shown as a single device in FIG. 1 for simplicity and clarity the various elements of control system 12 may be distributed over as many different hardware and software components as are required to optimally control the robot 11. The individual control routines/systems 25 resident in the controller 12 or readily accessible thereby may be stored in ROM or other suitable tangible memory location and/or memory device, and automatically executed by associated hardware components of the control system to provide the respective control functionality.

Referring to FIG. 2, a lower arm assembly 75 can be used as part of the robot 11 shown in FIG. 1. Each lower arm assembly 75 may include a hand 24 having a plurality of tendon-driven fingers 14 and a tendon-driven thumb 26. The term "tendon-driven" is explained below with reference to FIG. 3. The lower arm assembly 75 may include a plurality of finger actuators 40 that each may be respectively configured to selectively pull on, and release one or more tendons 50 (see FIG. 3) in a finger 14 or in a thumb 26. The lower arm assembly 75 may further include a plurality of wrist actuators 38 for moving the wrist joint (arrow 17). Printed circuit board assemblies (PCBA) 39 for the finger actuators 40 and/or the wrist actuators 38 may be positioned on or within the lower arm assembly 75 as shown for packing efficiency. The lower arm assembly 75 may be attached to a load cell 32, which is used to connect the lower arm assembly to the rest of the arm 22 of the robot 11 shown in FIG. 1.

Multiple finger actuators 40 may correspond to each finger 14 and thumb 26. In general, one finger actuator 40 may be used for each DOF available plus one additional finger actuator. Therefore, each finger 14 having three DOF requires four finger actuators 40, while each finger having two DOF requires three finger actuators, etc.

Referring to FIG. 3, a schematic perspective view is provided of a possible embodiment of the finger actuator 40. As shown, the finger actuator 40 may be provided with a tendon 50 having a proximal end 51 and a distal end 53, where the finger actuator 40 may be coupled with the proximal end 51 of the tendon 50. Additionally, a tendon terminator 52 may be coupled to the distal end 53 of the tendon 50, which may be operative to couple the tendon 50 to a finger 14 of the dexterous robot 11. The finger actuator 40 may include a motor 44, a gear drive 46, and a linear actuator 48, which may cooperate to apply a tension through the tendon 50 in response to an electrical current. The tendon 50 is illustrated in an off-center position within the finger 14, as more than one tendon may extend within a given finger. The motor 44, gear drive 46, and linear actuator 48 may all be located in the lower arm assembly 75 in order to minimize the packaging space required



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within the fingers **14** and the thumb **26**, and to allow for the larger components of the finger actuator **40**, such as the linear actuator **48**, to be remotely packaged with respect to the fingers and thumb.

The tendon **50** may be protected by a sheath or conduit liner **54** positioned within a protective outer conduit **56**. The tension sensor **58** measures the force of compression on the conduit **56** to determine the amount of tension placed on the tendon **50**. Tension in the tendons **50** can be used by the controller **12** shown in FIG. **1** to calculate the joint torques generated or experienced at the various joints of a given finger **14**, which in turn can be used by a motor controller **90** to control the actuation of the fingers and thumbs **26** of a given hand **24**.

As the finger actuator **40** moves the tendon **50**, the tendon **50** slides relative to the tension sensor **58**. The tendon **50** terminates within the finger **14** at the tendon terminator **52**. Movement of the tendon **50** may cause a relative movement of the tendon terminator **52**, which, as described above, may be affixed to a portion of a finger **14**. Force may be placed on the tendon terminator **52** either internally, i.e., by movement of the finger actuator **40**, or externally, i.e., on the finger **14** by the object **30** of FIG. **1**, which causes the tendon **50** to exert force on the linear actuator **48**.

FIG. **4** is a perspective, partially cross-sectional illustration of a finger actuator assembly **40**, such as provided in FIG. **3**. As shown, a motor **44** is powered to drive a gear drive **46** which, may in-turn cause rotation of a ball screw **60**. A ball nut **62** may be disposed about and/or have a threaded engagement with the ball screw **60**, and a guide pin **64** may extend from the ball nut **62** and prevents rotation of the ball nut **62** in response to movement of the ball screw **60**. In other embodiments, other linear actuator technology may be employed, such as for example, roller screws or backdriveable lead screws. In an embodiment, the guide pin **64** may extend at least partially through a slot **66** defined by the housing **68** of the linear actuator **48**. The interference between the guide pin **64** and the linear actuator housing **68** can serve to restrain any rotational movement of the guide pin **64**, and thus the ball nut **62**. Therefore, as the gear drive **46** rotates the ball screw **60**, the ball nut **62** may translate axially along the ball screw **60**. The motor **44**, gear drive **46** and ball screw **60** define a finger actuator axis **F** along which the ball nut **62** may be configured to travel.

The gear drive **46** may be connected to the ball screw **60** via a coupling **70**, which may allow the coupling **70** to transmit the torque of the gear drive **46** while minimizing transmission of any axial load. Additionally, a bearing **72** may be located between the coupling **70** and the ball screw **60** to reduce friction between the actuator housing **68** and the ball screw **60** and to carry the axial load transmitted from the tendon **50** to the ball screw **60**.

A position sensor **74** may be mounted to the finger actuator housing **68** to sense an axial position of the ball nut **62** along the ball screw **60**. As shown, the position sensor **74** may include Hall Effect sensor, with a magnet **76** attached to the ball nut **62**. Alternatively, the position sensor **74** may include a linear encoder or employ other continuous or discrete forms of position sensing.

The tendon **50** may be attached to the ball nut **62** in a suitable manner so that movement of the ball nut **62** may cause a corresponding movement of the tendon **50**. The movement of the tendon **50** may either straighten or bend the finger **14**, depending on which side of the finger **14** the tendon is disposed on. An additional finger actuator **40** may be utilized to perform the opposing straightening or bending motion. Therefore, each finger **14** (shown in FIG. **3**) may have

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at least one finger actuator **40** for each degree of freedom. In general each finger **14** may have one actuator per degree of freedom plus one additional actuator. For example, a three DOF finger may have four actuators and a four DOF finger has five actuators.

Each finger actuator **40** may be controlled by a respective motor controller **90** that may be electrically coupled with the motor **44**. Multiple motor controllers **90** may be included within a broader controller (e.g., controller **12** shown in FIG. **1**), or may be separate from each other. A motor controller **90** may be configured to either directly provide a motor **44** with an operating current **91**, or it may merely provide a higher level command that may otherwise control the flow of current through the motor. For example, in an embodiment, the motor controller **90** may provide the motor with a digital value between 0 and 255, which may, in turn, be translated by the motor **44** into a current or torque.

During operation, a minimal tension may be maintained by each tendon **50** and/or provided by each respective finger actuator **40** at all times. Because each tendon **50** is desirably only configured to pull, the minimal tension may allow a finger actuator **40** to be maintained in a "ready" state without any slack developing in the tendon **50**. Movement of the ball nut **62** in a distal direction **80** along axis **F** may lessen the tension applied through the tendon **50**; and conversely, movement of the ball nut **62** in a proximal direction **82** may increase the tension applied through the tendon **50**. To increase the speed at which the nut **62** may travel along axis **F**, and thus the response speed of the finger actuator **40**, the finger actuator **40** may have a relatively low gear ratio in the gear drive **46** and/or a low ratio in the ball screw **60**. In an embodiment, the gear ratio may be, for example and without limitation, approximately 14:1, however other gear ratios may similarly be used. The tradeoff with a lower torque reduction in the actuator **40**, however, is an increased likelihood that the tension maintained through the tendon **50** will back drive the ball nut **62** along the ball screw **60**. This contrasts with higher gear ratio systems that may have system dynamics inherently more difficult to back drive. To provide a system that can maintain a high tension through the tendon **50**, yet reduce the likelihood of the ball nut **62** back-driving along the ball screw **60**, the motor **44** may be configured to augment the system dynamics of the gear drive **46** and ball screw **60**.

FIG. **5** illustrates a current plot **100** and tension plot **102** that may be exhibited by a finger actuator **40** over the duration of a grasping routine (i.e., where the current plot **100** illustrates the current **101** provided to the motor **44** as a function of time **104**, and the tension plot **102** illustrates the tension **103** provided through a tendon **50** as a function of time **104**). As shown, the grasping procedure may be divided into, for example, six distinct periods (i.e., periods **106**, **108**, **110**, **112**, **114**, and **116**) that each may describe a different actuator **40** and/or controller **90** behavior within the procedure. These periods are meant to be purely illustrative, however, and should not be construed to limit the invention.

Within the first period **106**, the finger actuator **40** may be maintained in a "ready" state with a minimal tension **118** maintained through the tendon **50**. This minimal tension **118** may be generated, in part, by a minimal current **120** passing through the motor **44**. Upon being provided with an actuation command at time **122**, the current **101** may increase, which may cause the finger **14** to accelerate towards an object **30**. While the finger **14** is moving, the tension **103** through the tendon **50** may gradually increase, as shown in period **108**.

At time **124**, the finger **14** may engage the object **30**, wherein the tension **103** in the tendon **50** may quickly

increase to a steady state level **125** (i.e., the stall tension **125**). The ramp-up in tension **103** can be seen in period **110** of the tension plot **102**. At time **124**, the tension **103** may become discontinuous due to the external influence of the object **30** on the finger **14**. Depending on the compliance of the object **30**, the tension **103** through the tendon **50** may increase at a varying rate. Inevitably, however, the object **30** that is being grasped will provide enough resistance to cause the motor **44** to stall, thus providing no further increase in tension (i.e., time **126**). Once this occurs, the motor controller **90** may be configured to reduce the current **101** provided to the motor **44** down to a lower current level **128**, also referred to as the steady-state holding current **128**. In an embodiment, the steady state holding current **128** may be at or slightly below a maximum steady state current level **129**. Such a maximum level may represent the greatest amount of current that the motor **44** and/or controller **90** can operationally maintain over an indefinite period of time.

Once a stall tension **125** is reached, the controller **90** may provide a pulse current **130** to the motor **44**, as shown in period **114**, and initiated at time **132**. The pulse current **130** may have a relatively short duration **134**, though, may have a relatively high amplitude **136** (as compared with the holding current **128**). In an embodiment, the duration **134** of the pulse current **130** may be, for example and without limitation, approximately 10-50 milliseconds. Additionally, the amplitude **136** of the pulse current **130** may be at or slightly less than a maximum allowable instantaneous current **137** that may be provided by the controller **90**, or received by the motor **44**. In embodiment, as shown in FIG. 5, the system may dwell at the stall tension **125** for a period of time **112**. In another embodiment, the system need not dwell at the interim stall tension **125** for any prolonged period of time before providing the pulse current **130**. As such, the duration of period **112** may be reduced down to a single instance.

The pulse current **130** may cause the tension **103** in the tendon **50** to increase from the lower, stall tension **125** to a higher tension level **138** by forcibly driving the motor **44** with the high-amplitude surge. Once the pulse **130** falls back to the holding current **128** at time **142**, the higher tension level **138** may be maintained within the tendon **50** and finger actuator **40**, as shown in the tension plot **102** within period **116**. In an embodiment, the ability to maintain a higher tension at a lower current may be attributed, in part to frictional dynamics of the ball screw **60** and/or gear drive **46**, and, in part to the holding current **128** applied to the motor **44**. As such, the holding current **128** may augment the frictional dynamics of the finger actuator **40** to discourage the motor **44** from being back driven. Allowing the reduction to the lower holding current may provide a considerable power savings as compared to relying solely on the motor to maintain a high holding torque/tension.

FIG. 6 illustrates a method **150** of tensioning a robotically actuated finger-tendon **50** during a grasping routine. As shown upon being provided with a grasping command at **160**, the finger actuator motor **44** may be driven by a first current that may cause the finger to move into contact with an object **30** (Step **162**). As described above with respect to FIG. 5, upon contact, the tension **103** provided through the tendon **50** may increase until the forces generated by the motor **44** are balanced by the reactionary forces of the object **30**, at which time the motor **44** may stall. Once the stall is detected, a "tension boost" command may be provided at Step **164**. The tension boost command may cause the controller **90** to provide a pulse current **130** to the motor **44**. The pulse current

**130** may forcibly cause the motor **44** to impart a much higher tension on the tendon **50** than was initially maintained at the equilibrium state in Step **162**.

Following the delivery of the pulse current **130** in Step **164**, the current level provided to the motor **44** may fall back down to the initial stall current **128** reached in Step **166**. This current **128**, together with the frictional dynamics of the finger actuator **40**, may cause the boosted tension (imparted via the current pulse) to be maintained through the tendon **50**. Step **168** concludes the routine with a high tension **138** being maintained by a low current command.

While the best modes for carrying out the invention have been described in detail, those familiar with the art to which this invention relates will recognize various alternative designs and embodiments for practicing the invention within the scope of the appended claims. All directional references (e.g., upper, lower, upward, downward, left, right, leftward, rightward, above, below, vertical, and horizontal) are only used for identification purposes to aid the reader's understanding of the present invention, and do not create limitations, particularly as to the position, orientation, or use of the invention. It is intended that all matter contained in the above description or shown in the accompanying drawings shall be interpreted as illustrative only and not as limiting.

The invention claimed is:

1. A tendon tensioning system comprising:

- a tendon having a proximal end and a distal end;
- an actuator coupled with the proximal end of the tendon and configured to apply a tension through the tendon in response to an electrical current, the actuator including a drive screw and a motor; and
- a motor controller electrically coupled with the actuator, the motor controller configured to:
  - provide an electrical current having a first amplitude to the actuator until a stall tension is achieved through the tendon;
  - provide a pulse current to the actuator following the achievement of the stall tension, the amplitude of the pulse current being greater than the first amplitude; and
  - return the motor to a steady state holding current following the conclusion of the pulse current.

2. The system of claim 1, wherein the distal end of the tendon is coupled with a finger of a dexterous robot.

3. The system of claim 1, wherein the drive screw is a ball screw, the actuator further including a ball nut disposed about the ball screw and coupled with the tendon.

4. The system of claim 1, wherein the motor controller is configured to allow the tension maintained in the tendon to dwell at the stall tension for a period of time before providing the pulse current to the actuator.

5. The system of claim 1, wherein the holding current has an amplitude less than a maximum steady state current level of the system, and wherein the amplitude of the pulse current is less than a maximum instantaneous current level of the system.

6. The system of claim 1, wherein the pulse current provided to the actuator is operative to increase the tension provided through the tendon to a boosted tension level, the boosted tension level being greater than the stall tension.

7. The system of claim 6, wherein the actuator is configured to maintain the boosted tension level through the tendon following the conclusion of the pulse current.

8. The system of claim 1, wherein the actuator configured to maintain at least a minimal tension on the tendon at all times during operation, the minimal tension being less than the stall tension.

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9. A system for providing an increased grasping force through a finger of a dexterous robot during a grasping routine, the system comprising:

a tendon having a proximal end and a distal end and extending along a length of a finger of a dexterous robot, the distal end of the tendon being coupled to the finger;

a finger actuator including a drive screw and a motor and located in a lower arm assembly of the dexterous robot and apart from the finger, the finger actuator coupled with the proximal end of the tendon and configured to apply a tension through the tendon in response to an electrical current; and

a motor controller electrically coupled with the finger actuator, the motor controller configured to:

provide an electrical current having a first amplitude to the finger actuator until a stall tension is achieved through the tendon;

provide a pulse current to the actuator following the achievement of the stall tension, the amplitude of the pulse current being greater than the first amplitude; and

return the motor to a steady state holding current following the conclusion of the pulse current.

10. The system of claim 9, wherein the drive screw is a ball screw, the actuator further including a ball nut disposed about the ball screw and coupled with the tendon.

11. The system of claim 9, wherein the motor controller is configured to allow the tension maintained in the tendon to dwell at the stall tension for a period of time before providing the pulse current to the actuator.

12. The system of claim 9, wherein the holding current has an amplitude less than a maximum steady state current level of the system, and wherein the amplitude of the pulse current is less than a maximum instantaneous current level of the system.

13. The system of claim 9, wherein the pulse current provided to the actuator is operative to increase the tension pro-

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vided through the tendon to a boosted tension level, the boosted tension level being greater than the stall tension.

14. The system of claim 13, wherein the actuator is configured to maintain the boosted tension level through the tendon following the conclusion of the pulse current.

15. A method for controlling an actuator to tension a tendon, the method comprising:

providing a tendon having a proximal end and a distal end; providing an actuator coupled with the proximal end of the tendon and configured to apply a tension through the tendon in response to an electrical current, the actuator including a drive screw and a motor;

driving the actuator with an electrical current having a first amplitude until a stall tension is achieved through the tendon;

delivering a pulse current to the actuator following the achievement of the stall tension, the amplitude of the pulse current being greater than the first amplitude; and returning the electrical current delivered to the motor to a steady state holding amplitude following the conclusion of the pulse current.

16. The method of claim 15, wherein the pulse current provided to the actuator is operative to increase the tension provided through the tendon to a boosted tension level, the boosted tension level being greater than the stall tension.

17. The method of claim 15, further comprising: providing a dexterous robot having a plurality of fingers; and

wherein the distal end of the tendon is coupled with a finger of a dexterous robot.

18. The method of claim 17, wherein the dexterous robot includes forty two degrees of freedom.

19. The method of claim 17, wherein the electrical current causes the actuator to apply a force to the finger.

20. The method of claim 15, wherein the electrical current at the steady state holding amplitude discourages the motor from back driving.

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